

# SHANNON BROOK FARM

ORGANIC • PASTURE-RAISED • LOCALICIOUS  
CHICKEN & LAMB

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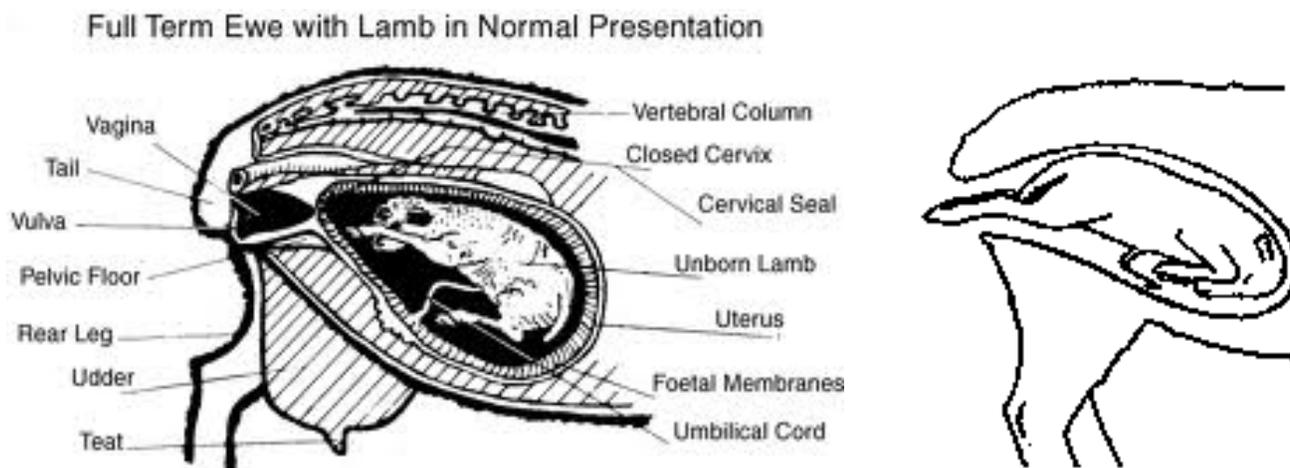
## Shannon Brook Farm Newsletter

May 18, 2013

This week on the farm a couple of lambs were born. Shepherds plan when to expose their ewes to their ram but it's never a sure-fire process. Lambs may or may not arrive 5 months later. Usually they do but not always in the numbers expected. Sometimes a whole bunch arrive in a week and other times they dribble in over six to eight weeks.

Our most recent lamb grew inside of her dam facing the opposite direction in which most lambs develop. The lamb was upright and facing the same direction as her mother. More frequently they face toward the back end of the ewe, ready to dive out into the world.

The underside of the rear hooves appearing first was the clue that the lamb was facing forward. If the front legs had been first we would have seen the upper side of the front hooves unless the lamb was somehow rotated. The Ontario Ministry of Food & Agriculture illustrates a normal presentation in the diagram below to the left. Our lamb was as shown in the diagram to the right.



After understanding the lamb's orientation we were in standby mode to make sure the ewe stayed upright. She kept lying on her side, several times rolling on to her back. Sheep don't do well on their backs so we were ready to assist by steadily and firmly pushing her up to a normal resting position.

Prior to the ewe visibly starting to lamb she walked around the pasture bellowing for about an hour. This told us that she was getting ready. Another ewe that is about a year younger and who also recently lambed came over with her newborn to be with the laboring ewe. She and her baby stayed with the older ewe for about 45 minutes until the new lamb arrived.

In general it's thought to be a good practice not to help a ewe deliver. Under certain circumstances such as the lamb's legs being tangled, the lamb being too big for the ewe or the ewe spending too much time and energy straining it is important to assist. The problem lies in the fact that beginning shepherds don't

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know what they are seeing or doing. Studying diagrams, reading manuals, going to workshops and talking with our vet has helped a lot but when you're in the delivery room it's a little different! The good news is that most of the time most ewes do just fine on their own.

We noted the time that she started to actively lamb in case she didn't make much progress. It's hard to know how much time passes when we're anxiously awaiting delivery. A few minutes seems like an eternity. Our Small Ruminant Cornell Cooperative Extension Agent recommends having a good book to read while waiting. Another option is tidying up the barn while keeping an eye on the ewe. This way she has some privacy but isn't left alone.

We knew the lamb was alive because the feet wiggled as if trying to make their way to solid ground. Then the tail appeared. It seemed long. Hanging half way out of the ewe the lamb surprised us – drawing her back hooves up and planting them on her mother's haunches she shoved to help make her way out. We had heard that lambs will help with their own birth but we did not know what that meant.



*Ewe delivering lamb with companion ewe and her lamb nearby*



*Newborn peaks out from home base*

Eventually the lamb dropped to the dry, dirty ground in a patch of gravel. Her wet body falling in a heap. When she started to get up her back was covered with large chunks of gravel. The ewe had chosen to lamb on the farm lane rather than on the fresh, clean grass 20' away.

The lamb quickly attempted to stand and, as frequently happens, fell and stood again several times. The mother licked her for quite a while, cleaning and drying her baby.

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*Ewe with lamb immediately after delivery - within seconds the lamb was standing...and falling...and standing*



*She stands by splaying her legs*

*Focusing on standing again*

*Struggling to get up*



*Lamb makes her first attempt at nursing*

*Successfully nursing*

*Mother ewe checks out her lamb*

The rest of the day we checked on the ewe and her lamb making sure all was well. This lamb was quick to start nibbling the grass. Within a couple of hours she was playing with it at least acting as if she were eating it. All of the other sheep were grazing so she was taking a lesson.

A day later the ewe lamb was so quick that we could not catch her. She zooms around on her knobby stilts evading us with her every turn. Most shepherds will tell you that one needs to catch the lambs the day they are born to clip the umbilical cord, dip it in iodine, tag its ear and weigh it because by day two it's much harder to get your hands on them. She weighed in at over 10 lbs.